5 Reasons I Wear A Mask

(and you can too)

a short zine about masking & disability justice

introduction

Whenever I leave the house I do a quick check to make sure I've got my keys, wallet, and phone, just like most people.

But I also check for one more crucial item—a high quality face mask.

I wear a mask every time I'm in an indoor space with folks I don't know and in large crowds outside. Like many people this is a habit I picked up in 2020 as a mitigation for COVID transmission.

Here are 5 reasons it's a habit I've yet to give up and why I think you should mask too.

reason #1: keeping others safe

Before 2020, each of us was expected to manage being sick mostly on our own. But the collective COVID pandemic response showed us a better way is possible! Wearing a mask is a simple way to stand in solidarity with disabled people and advocate for disability justice.

In May 2026 there was an average ***179,000 new COVID infections*** *in the US every day*[1]*.*

Besides COVID, there are many diseases—like measles, the flu, and the common cold—that are spread through the air and can be mitigated with a quality respirator[2]. As of today, 5/26, in Oregon, there is a 50% chance someone in any group of 100 people is infectious with COVID[1].

By wearing a mask I keep any airborne germs I might be carrying to myself, lowering the risk of spreading germs in the air around me. For immunocompromised people, who sometimes can't get vaccinated[3], this is lifesaving. For everyone else, it lowers the risk of missing work or school while sick.

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1. Hoerger, "COVID-19 Data Dashboard."
2. Wang et al., "Airborne Transmission of Respiratory Viruses."
3. Tastrom, "I'm Immunocompromised."

reason #2: keeping me safe

There are a lot of reasons I want to avoid catching airborne diseases.

➔ I am immunocompromised so any illness tends to hit my system harder than expected.

➔ Having a cold every year is just annoying. *(Can't remember the last time I had a cold!)*

➔ I can't afford to miss work.

COVID is still dangerous. Every infection:

➔ Increases your risk of catching it again[4]

➔ Increases your risk of Long COVID, with symptoms like chronic brain fog and fatigue[5]. *(Long COVID was the most common chronic condition in US children last year[6].)*

➔ Increases immune system dysfunction for up to 20 months[7], making it harder to fight off other infections.

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4. Bowe et al., "Acute and Postacute Sequelae Associated with SARS-CoV-2 Reinfection."
5. Hou et al., "Global Prevalence of Long COVID, Its Subtypes, and Risk Factors."
6. Newsweek, "Why Are so Many Children Getting Long COVID?"
7. Jiang et al., "Persistent Attenuation of Lymphocyte Subsets after Mass SARS-CoV-2 Infection."

reason #3: showing up with love

bell hooks wrote about the need for a *love ethic* in liberatory movements:

> As long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination.
>
> Without an ethic of love shaping…our radical aspirations, we are often seduced, in one way or the other, into continued allegiance to systems of domination—imperialism, sexism, racism, classism…
>
> [I]t is in choosing love, and beginning with love as the ethical foundation for politics, that we are best positioned to transform society in ways that enhance the collective good.[8]

Wearing a mask is a simple way to signal that you value the safety of others. It shows a commitment to hooks's love ethic that includes disabled people and anyone else—such as kids or elders—who are at higher risk of illness.

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8. "Love as the Practice of Freedom."

reason #4: practicing taking action, even if it's uncomfy

Often when I talk to folks about masking they worry what other people will think about them if they are the only one wearing a mask.

After countless hours of being the only person masked at work in a healthcare office, at the grocery store, at concerts, in classes, and while traveling, I can confidently say:

> *No one cares if you are masking, except the people masks protect!*

Wearing a mask is a way to practice taking direct action as a co-conspirator[9].

It reminds me that my comfort isn't more important than the safety of others. Sitting in discomfort is one small way to practice dismantling internalized white supremacy culture[10].

And if someone does say something critical?

That social conflict is good practice, too!

9.Knittel, "Making The Transition from Ally to Co-Conspirator."
10.Okun, *White Supremacy Culture*.

reason #5: who keeps us safe? we keep us safe!

If the past six years since the start of the COVID pandemic has taught me anything, it's that systems of power will do anything to return to a status quo of capitalist production, despite ongoing risks.

If the government won't fund research for better tests[11], make up-to-date vaccines readily available[12], or invest in improving indoor air quality[13], it's up to us to protect each other as much as we can.

3 things you can do right now

1. Mask up in public buildings & large crowds.

2. Get annual COVID and flu vaccines.

3. Remind yourself what to do if you are exposed to COVID or think you have symptoms:

   peoplescdc.org/what-to-do-if-you-have-covid/

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11. McGee, "Are At-Home COVID Tests Accurate?"
12. Roubein et al., "RFK Jr. Ends Coronavirus Shot Recommendation for Healthy Children, Pregnant Women."
13. Royal Academy of Engineering, "Ventilation Matters."

I hope these pages offered some food for thought about masking as essential community care.

If you aren't currently masking it's always okay to start again!

We're always trying to balance the best way to keep ourselves and the people we care about safe; I encourage you to expand this reflection to include people vulnerable to airborne viruses.

resources

There are many sources for lower cost, high quality masks. Here's one list:

reddit.com/r/Masks4All/wiki/index/

There are also masks & tests available for free through local mutual aid groups, like:

instagram.com/freecovidtestspdx

Covid Safer PDX maintains a calendar of upcoming masked events & map of mask-preferred businesses:

covidsaferpdx.weebly.com

These resources, plus more, & zine citations are also available online:

incorporealbard.online/5reasonsimask/

citations

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